

Ornithological Literature

Edited by Sara R. Morris

BABY BIRD PORTRAITS BY GEORGE MIKSCH SUTTON. By Paul A. Johnsgard. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman. 1998: 81 pp., 35 color plates. \$24, hardcover.—Watercolor is a difficult, very spontaneous medium, but one that lends itself to effects generally unachievable with oils—such as making a downy chick truly appear soft and fluffy. George Miksch Sutton was a master at achieving this effect. This small volume is a collection of 35 color plates (one of which is only found on the back of the dustjacket) from the collection of the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago. Five of the birds shown are adults, a few are in juvenal plumage, but most are either downy chicks or juveniles that still retain some juvenal down. The newly-hatched curlew (the chick on the back of the dustjacket) is a wonderful portrait with a habitat background; the others are simple portraits without backgrounds. Reproduction of these portraits is exceptional—particularly since many of the paintings have been considerably enlarged from the original, thus potentially showing flaws in the artist's workmanship. I suspect that Sutton would have insisted that they not be enlarged. Instead of flaws, however, the enlargement truly reveals the artist's skill.

Is this merely a beautiful picture book? No way! Sutton painted with a purpose. He painted to document the natal and juvenal plumages and soft-part colors of these birds and he has succeeded. Sutton prided himself on painting birds directly from life—really directly from life, unlike others who painted them from fresh specimens “shortly after life.” While spending summers at the Edward S. George Reserve in Michigan, he studied development of plumages of several “sparrow” species, not only by monitoring nests, but also by raising young in captivity. Some of these paintings were published in Sutton's technical papers, others in popular articles published in Audubon magazine, but this is the first time they have been brought together in a publication. Dates and locations where the birds

were painted are given in an appendix, but no captions other than Sutton's penciled annotations are provided with the plates. Plates 9 and 10, of young male Northern Cardinals (*Cardinalis cardinalis*) are reversed relative to the information in the appendix and are apparently not of the birds described in the text.

Text provided with each plate is an anecdotal portrait of interesting life history information that draws on Johnsgard's personal experiences with the species as well as Sutton's writings and the work of others. The text nicely complements the artwork and is typical “Johnsgard”.—JEROME A. JACKSON.

COLLINS ILLUSTRATED CHECKLIST: BIRDS OF SOUTHERN AFRICA. By Ber van Perlo. Harper Collins, London. 1999: 320 pp., 84 color plates, numerous line drawings, 1228 range maps. \$35.00 (Paper).—When Ber van Perlo's “Illustrated Checklist” for eastern Africa appeared in 1995 it created a stir. For the first time color illustrations of all the region's birds were brought together in a single, compact book. For many, the checklist quickly became the book of choice to carry into the field. Unfortunately, some deficiencies became apparent just as fast. Telegraphic text and tiny illustrations were acceptable in a “checklist,” which made no pretence to be a fully-featured field guide. However, the text, illustrations and maps all contained significant sprinklings of errors—mainly minor—but misleading for the less experienced. Add a set of English names quite different to those commonly used in East Africa, and considerable confusion was (and continues to be) caused.

Now a southern African version has appeared, covering the region from Angola, Zambia, Malawi, and Mozambique south to the Cape. It looks and feels very similar to its sister volume and follows almost exactly the same format. A short introduction explains the book's coverage and the aspects (appearance, habits, habitat, occurrence and voice) that are